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Globe and Mail August 22 2011 Goderich Tornado

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Globe and Mail

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Toronto

TORONTO EDITOR: ANGELA MURPHY

URBAN CAMPUSES

Schools, city gird for a street fight

Universities want to hold on to experimental pedestrian space indefinitely, which would continue to close two roads to traffic

CARYS MILLS

Buying veggies at a farmers' market, playing a pickup hockey game or even walking to class without waiting for traffic isn't usual at Toronto's downtown universities.

But while the city experiments with shutting down parts of streets at Ryerson University and the University of Toronto — as it has for the past year — such things are possible.

Tables, chairs and huge planters have replaced traffic on roads running through both campuses.

Now, with little more than a month left for the one-year closings, both schools are trying to hold on to the rare pedestrian space, indefinitely.

"It's the main artery for the campus," Ryerson's vice-president of administration and finance Julia Hanigsberg said of the Gould Street closing. The U of T closing encompasses Wilcocks Street between Huron and St. George Streets.

"In an urban campus like ours, there aren't that many places you can just wander around and have that feeling of being in the middle of a university," said Ms.

Hanigsberg. For at least a decade, she said, Ryerson has been working toward creating a visible space for its students, something that can bring a greater sense of community often missing from urban universities.

It seems both schools may gain the pedestrian space they want.

City staff will be recommending both streets remain closed permanently when the decision goes to community council next month.

But it means the city will need to rethink traffic flow around the universities, diverting vehicles whose drivers had become accustomed to driving through the campuses.

The city, universities and businesses are now trying to balance their needs before a decision is made.

If continuation of the experiment is not approved, both closings will end Sept. 30.

"Traffic items need to be managed carefully," said James Robinson, executive director of the Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Area.

Mr. Robinson said he and many of the businesses near Ryerson are mainly supportive

of the closing of Gould Street, between O'Keefe Lane and Bond Street, as long as alternative traffic plans are made.

For the businesses just west of Yonge Street, the closing is coupled with nearby construction, making deliveries, loading and off loading more difficult than usual.

A temporary solution has been proposed, allowing vehicles to turn west from a lane toward Yonge Street, but Mr. Robinson said it's not a permanent solution. Once nearby construction is finished, he wants turn restrictions to be reviewed that would ease businesses trying to get west of Yonge Street.

However, Mr. Robinson said closing the street could ultimately keep more people in the area and is positive for business.

Surveys initiated by the city to gauge the community's response to the closings got 2,600 Ryerson respondents, Ms. Hanigsberg said, and 97 per cent were in favour.

Ms. Hanigsberg said she doesn't think the road closings will hit a political nerve similar to the one bike lanes have.

"I don't think it represents an impediment in people getting

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In an urban campus like ours, there aren't that many places you can just wander around and have that feeling of being in the middle of a university.

Julia Hanigsberg
Ryerson vice-president

downtown in their cars," she said. "So I think it's not likely to become a political hot potato and certainly we hope it doesn't."

If approved, Ms. Hanigsberg said Ryerson would take over the responsibility and cost of maintenance, which would be negotiated in five-year terms. She said the closing would be reviewed by the city each year.

Because the University of Toronto's closing is somewhat contained within the campus it hasn't been disruptive to the community, said Elizabeth

Sisam, assistant vice-president of campus facilities and planning.

Earlier last week, a farmers' market — a weekly occurrence — took over the closed part of the street, which is marked by green turf, planters, street furniture and blue leaves painted on the road.

While some shopped at the market and others used the street furniture, Joseph Duong said he almost turned onto the closed section of the street because he didn't see obvious signage.

"It's actually really confusing, it's already tight," he said referring to the road and parking spots. He parked his car in a no-parking zone at the edge of the street closing while he waited for a friend.

"I kind of think it's unnecessary, isn't there already enough space?" he said, adding there should be better signage warning drivers.

Originally there were two closings at U of T, but one on Devonshire Place was discontinued after a few months because of a lack of pedestrian traffic, according to the city. Ms. Sisam agrees it just wasn't attracting students as well as the other spaces have.



Police examine a crushed vehicle amid the rubble after a massive storm ripped through Goderich Sunday. GEOFF ROBINS/THE CANADIAN PRESS

WEATHER

One dead as tornado slams Southern Ontario

KATE HAMMER

A storm system swept over Southern Ontario Sunday, including a tornado that touched down in Goderich, Ont., causing one fatality, numerous injuries and extensive damage to a community located on the shores of Lake Huron, 200 kilometres west of Toronto.

As Environment Canada confirmed that the twister reached speeds of up to 250 kilometres an hour, images of the town's hard-hit downtown core flooded the Internet. The images depicted a large brick church without a roof, cars tossed on their sides, toppled red brick buildings and homes crushed by trees.

London OPP Sergeant Dave Rektor said the damage is widespread.

"We have extensive damage to the downtown core and we have a report of injuries. I don't have the conditions of anybody who's injured at this point," he said.

"We're going to be going through the buildings and looking for people and check just to make sure everybody's accounted for."



Instructors from a Toronto sailing school help reel in a boat that overturned. MICHELLE SIU/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Local news outlets reported that the town had declared a state of emergency.

Area radio station CKNX reported that downtown businesses, century old buildings and several churches lost their

roofs and upper floors. Andrea Ross, who works at the Cedar Lodge Motel in Goderich, said the storm was the most violent she has ever experienced, as the skies became very dark with huge clouds.

"I've heard a lot of the buildings are half gone or fully gone," Ms. Ross said. "It's a pretty big mess downtown."

Police have blocked traffic from entering the downtown core.

In Toronto, torrential rains and gusting winds toppled sailboats, tore limbs from trees and disrupted power to more than 10,000 Toronto homes.

The storm moved in swiftly and overturned two sailboats containing seven sailing students from the Harbourfront Centre around 3:30 p.m. The students were rescued by instructors located in nearby motorboats.

The power outages were scattered in small pockets mostly within the downtown core, where aging maple and poplar trees lost limbs to gusts that may have reached 90 kilometres an hour.

More than 160 incidents resulting from the powerful winds and rain were reported to Toronto Hydro.

"We're responding mostly in the downtown core, with a few calls in the west and in the Scarborough area," said Jennifer Link, a spokeswoman. "That storm was pretty heavy; any time it's windy it can blow tree limbs into our cables."

With files from Michelle Siu and The Canadian Press



The courthouse in downtown Goderich sits in the middle of a ruined town square. GEOFF ROBINS/THE CANADIAN PRESS

TORNADO

Storm a new blow to struggling town

It leaves one dead, 40 injured and businesses destroyed as historic Goderich has been struggling toward economic renewal

CARYS MILLS GODERICH, ONT.

At the site of the Sifto salt mine, one of the largest employers in Goderich, Ont., a large pile of salt lay exposed to the elements, and the walls of a warehouse appear to have been blown out.

The aboveground portions of Sifto Canada Corp. were hard hit when a tornado ripped through the small community on Lake Huron. Hundreds of employees have been told not to show up for work at the mine, which produces salt for de-icing, until further notice, said miner Joe Garrick, who has worked there for a decade.

"We probably won't be working for a while," Mr. Garrick said on Monday. "I just stayed away because I've seen pictures, and it looks pretty bad."

Company spokeswoman Kelly Barton said damage is still being assessed and it's unknown when employees will be called back. The mine employs 466 people and its evaporation plant employs 89.

The town of about 8,000 was already picking up the pieces of natural and economic disaster. In the mid-1990s, another devastating storm spun through town. Last year, Volvo Construction Equipment Corp. closed its Goderich site, putting 500 people out of work.

Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty said on Monday that the province has set aside \$5-million to help Goderich.

Sunday's storm injured nearly 40 people and killed 61-year-old Normand Laberge, who was on the job at the mine. His family said he had worked there for 31 years and was likely putting goods on a boat when the storm hit.

"It's kind of ironic that he passed there, because that's what he did. He worked all the time," said his daughter, Jocelyne Laberge, who came to Goderich on Monday after hearing of her father's death.

Mr. Garrick said he knew Mr. Laberge as a hard worker who paid his dues as an underground miner and was promoted to above-ground work. He

was friendly, too, Mr. Garrick said.

The deadly tornado also ripped apart historic buildings and countless homes, striking a blow to the town's renewal efforts.

"I felt that we were really recovering," Goderich Mayor Deb Shewfelt said. "We've got to do it over again."

The tornado, which Environment Canada meteorologists said was a three on the Fujita scale, with winds gusting up to 250 km/h, wreaked particular devastation on the town's historic areas. A Victoria Street church near the town centre was destroyed. Onlookers cycling around town to survey the damage stopped their bikes to take photos around the crumbling building missing much of its roof.

Others took in the town square from behind yellow police tape. At the centre is the county court. The windows were blown out of a nearby bank.

Local officials wonder whether the historic character of the town, which they say was incorporated in 1850 as a headquarters for land distribution, can ever be restored.

"I think that's going to be the trick, how do we reinvent our self and yet keep heritage?" Mr. Shewfelt said.

On Monday afternoon, Mr. McGuinty surveyed the damage by car and stopped at a community centre that is acting as an information and food hub for those without power.

"I have never seen such devastation," he said.

The effects of the disaster were visible all over town.

"We're all out of work now," said Jeff Brown, who said his workplace, Blue Water Body and Fender, is heavily damaged.

After layoffs last year, he said he's not sure how the town will do this time around.

"The town seemed to bounce back over time ... Now this is really, really going to hurt."

Mr. Garrick, the Sifto miner, said he will focus on restoring his home, which has a tree through the roof, before he worries about getting back to work.



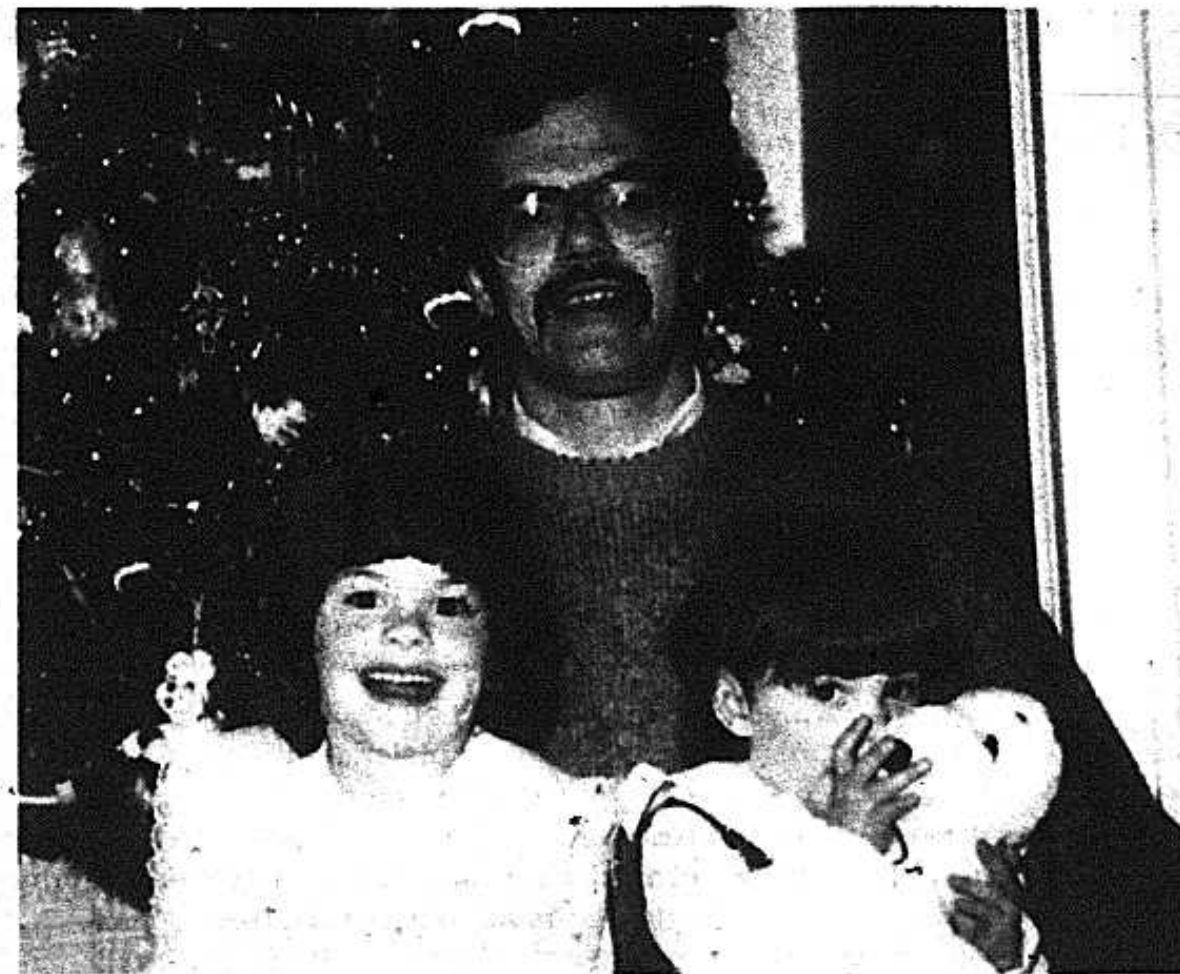
Debbie Hakkers looks for possessions at her tornado-ravaged house on Monday. FRANK GUNN/THE CANADIAN PRESS



Severe damage is seen at the Sifto salt mine on Monday, killing one worker. GEOFF ROBINS/THE CANADIAN PRESS



Residents survey and clean up the damage produced by the tornado. FERNANDO MORALES/THE GLOBE AND MAIL



Normand Laberge, Marie-Louise Laberge, and Jocelyne Laberge. Normand was killed while at work.

WHERE DISASTER STRUCK



THE GLOBE AND MAIL